



**Prayer of Thanksgiving:** We can be thankful that in everything, Jesus being completely obedient to the Father for us, God reconciled humanity to himself in His Son. **"And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lu 2:49 ESV) "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart." (Lu 2:51 ESV)**

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations Mrs. Jack and C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

**Open Hand Food Bank – Moncton** - is in need of grocery plastic bags to give out food to those in need. If you are interested in donating your unused grocery bags, you can bring them to church and someone will collect them and bring them over. Those who want to bring food to give to the **Open Food Bank** may do so by bringing to church and giving it to **Michael M.** of the Moncton congregation.

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#### **ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF January 2019**

Times of worship services: **Moncton** – 10:30 AM every Sunday

**In Saint John** – January 13 and 27 at 2:30 p.m.

**Communion**- on the second and fourth Sunday of the month.

**Address: Moncton**—70 King St. —Sage building;

**Saint John**—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

**Moncton – Discipleship group** - Wednesday, January 9 – 730 – home of Mr. and Mrs. Vautour. Topic 1 Peter 1.

**Format:** Each person attending is to prepare one question for discussion in the group.

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**The good news of the gospel is a message to be shared with others.** Please pray that God will give us the love and wisdom to be able to share this message with others in a loving, clear and confident manner as we participate in his missional work on the earth in our generation. **"5 ¶ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (Col 4:5-6 ESV)**

**Please pray** that God will put an end to the senseless violence happening in North America continent and other parts of the world.

**Pray that we will see the good works that God has prepared for us in advance** so that we can enthusiastically participate in the on-going work He is doing now on this earth in bringing people in relationship with him in Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

**Please pray, as per Jesus instructions, the disciples prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10)** as our world is suffering so much and in need of complete restoration by the King of kings, Jesus. As we are his royal priesthood, let us proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, as we are instructed in 1 Peter 2.

**Pray for the world and for all people:** we live in a world that does not know the way to peace. Important to pray as we are instructed by the apostle Paul — **"1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior," (1Ti 2:1–3 ESV)**

By [Ted Johnston](#) - [July 09, 2018](#)

I realize that the word "evangelism" makes many who read this blog uncomfortable. Some even think evangelism is contrary to incarnational Trinitarian theology. Let me ease your mind, by quoting from the book, [Gospel, Church, and Ministry](#), in which T.F. Torrance is quoted as writing this:

The church today in its faint-heartedness and skepticism seems to have lost its nerve...adapting the gospel to modern man instead of bringing modern man face to face with the gospel.... The Church cannot discharge the task that Christ has laid upon it without offering unadulterated witness and **engaging in pure evangelism**, cost what it may in scorn and ridicule or oppression. If at the point the Church seeks to save its life it will lose it, but here if it is ready to lose it for Christ's sake and the gospel's it will find it. (p. 160, emphasis added)

Strong words these, and in this post I want to address the topic of engaging in what T.F. calls "pure evangelism." My goal is not to guilt you (or me, or anyone else) into being active in evangelism. Instead, I want to encourage you, and set you free to participate with Jesus in this vital (and joy-filled) aspect of his ongoing ministry. I can testify from my own experience that there is no work more thrilling and fruitful than that of evangelism. As Lyle Dorsett says in the forward to [The Sacrament of Evangelism](#), "God is present with the witness [evangelist] and the person being witnessed to—and the Lord brings new life when He is met there in faith" (Root & Guthrie, p.9). To that I add my hearty, Amen!

### **What is evangelism?**

As we understand from incarnational Trinitarian theology, evangelism is not about "taking Christ" to people. Instead, as Lyle Dorsett says...

*...it is helping folks become aware of our "God who is here" now and that He wants to transform our souls and lives.... Because all people are created in God's image, they long for fellowship with Him, in the way Adam and Eve experienced His presence before the fall. Because God made us to have intimacy with Him, He wants to meet us and transform us into who we were created to be. (Ibid., pp. 9-10)*

It is with this truth about who God is and who we humans are in relation to God that Root and Guthrie approach evangelism not as a duty, but as a "sacrament"—meaning that it's about experiencing in a powerful, life-transforming way the presence of the triune God. Root and Guthrie comment:

*Those who practice [evangelism] find that God is always showing up. Of course, He is already there, but those engaged in this sacrament begin to see Him regularly because their eyes are open to His presence. They practice His presence in their prayers for family, friends, and coworkers—even when those prayers are repeated year after year, seemingly unanswered. Hearts full of concern that others know the love and forgiveness of God keep us mindful of His nearness as we pray. Those concerned that others in their world discover the grace of Christ tend to be alert to the daily evidence of God's activity around them. They see Him when they build a relationship, when they take a risk, and when they are rejected. They also see Him when a dear friend becomes a new follower of Christ. (Ibid., p. 16)*

Again, we note that when we evangelize, we're not "taking Jesus" anywhere. Not only is he (in his divinity) omnipresent, through the hypostatic union Jesus assumed our human nature, and thus our humanity is included in his. In other words, the human Jesus (now glorified and in heaven) is already intimately involved with all people—sharing their humanity, thus present to them and with them through the Spirit as he works in his time and way to reveal himself to those who do not yet know him; those who do not yet know that the Father has reconciled himself to them through Jesus—those who do not know that because of who Jesus is and what he has done, they are forgiven, accepted and loved by the Father (and the Son and the Spirit) unconditionally.

Our work as evangelists is, therefore, to join with Jesus who already is at work in the lives of all non-believers (believers too!). Evangelism is Jesus' work and as his disciples we are called both to participate personally and directly, then, as we have opportunity, equip others so that they might participate as well. Root and Guthrie say this about this calling to evangelism:

*The sacrament of evangelism is not about getting a few more notches in our outreach belts, about following a formula. It's about working with [God], worshiping Him, and knowing Him as we participate with Him in bringing the lost, sinful, and hurting people to Himself. The work will go on, with or without you. But if you choose to stand aside, God will still work, but you will be the loser. (Ibid., p. 17)*

My prayer is that we all will take a fresh look at evangelism and begin approaching it as the joy-filled privilege it is, in that it means participating with the Triune God as the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit woos people to himself. Root and Guthrie comment:

*Few activities give a sense of meaning and purpose more clearly than the privilege of leading another human being to faith in Christ and discipling that person to lead others to Christ as well. (Ibid., p. 20)*

## How do we go about evangelizing?

Though evangelism is not about implementing some set formula, it does involve certain attitudes (heart), knowledge (head) and skill (hands). One of the dangers in reading about evangelism (as you are now doing) is that you might conclude that the most important thing is head knowledge. Well, let me dispossess you of that notion. While knowledge of evangelism is important, it's far less important than getting "out there" to meet non-believers leading to meaningful conversations, that, in turn, lead to building authentic (real) relationships that involve sharing life. In that regard, I'm reminded that Jesus didn't give his disciples long lectures about evangelism—he simply "hit the road" as the evangelist that he was, and invited his disciples to come along and share what he was doing. It appears from the Gospel accounts that, at first, his disciples did not have a clue about what they were doing. But as they gained "hands-on" experience, their knowledge grew and their competency soared and along with that came the transformation of their hearts (remember it's about hands, head and heart; often in that order). Root and Guthrie comment:

*The more you share your faith, the more people will ask questions—hard questions. The more you take people and their questions seriously, the more you will grow as you dig for answers. Sharing Jesus will help you gain a fuller understanding of your life in Christ, more deeply than you are likely to gain if you are idle evangelistically. This too is evidence of the sacrament of evangelism, because in the act of wrestling with questions of others, we discover more about God and His presence. Second, you will grow spiritually because those with whom you share Christ will be watching to see if you are the real thing.... Nonbelievers are looking for authenticity, since so often Christians are seen as hypocrites. People want to see if the Christ we preach makes a difference in our lives. (Ibid., pp. 26-27)*

Were we together right now, discussing this post, I'd suggest we stop talking and head into the streets (or the local pub!) to start meeting people and talking with them, looking to learn what Jesus, through the Spirit, is already doing in those peoples' lives. We'd then look for ways to join in. By doing so, we'd learn a lot about evangelism—likely far more than by just talking (or reading) about it. Remember what Paul wrote to his friend Philemon:

*I pray that the faith you share may make you understand every blessing we have in Christ. (Philemon 1:6, NCV)*

Paul apparently felt that a full-orbed understanding (at the head and heart level) of the blessings we have in Christ comes by actively participating with Jesus in his work of sharing our faith (evangelism). Though I'm sure this can also be said of other aspects of ministry, it's my personal conviction and experience (and I believe Scripture supports this) that the greatest understanding of the heart, mind and hands (activity) of Jesus comes as we participate with him in leading non-believers to their Savior—which is about their eyes being opened by the Spirit to see that Jesus is right there with them (always has been). It's here, in this work of evangelism, that we see Jesus doing some of his most amazing, life-transforming work. The good news is that we get to have a part, if we'll just "dive in." And so I ask, will we? Will you? Will I?

### It begins (and continues) with prayer

As Root and Guthrie note, evangelism that is real participation in the work of Jesus (versus some sort of perfunctory scheme), begins (and continues) with intercessory prayer. This is where the groundwork is laid. Root and Guthrie put it this way:

*Prayer and practicing God's presence [the essence of prayer] are not some fancy add-ons to our sacramental evangelism. They are its engine.... One way to pray to the God who is already present with us and is also with the person we wish to reach, is to ask that the other person's heart be opened to the gospel. The Lord, in a sense, stands both between us and above us. There is more involved in sacramental evangelism than horizontal, one-on-one witnessing. Before you do that necessary act, be sure to start your vertical ministry: pray. Then God, who loves this person more than you do anyway, will begin to do His work from above, down into the heart of the person, before you even open your mouth. You may even find that God was already working before you offered any prayers. (Ibid., p. 37)*

### Plant seeds through storytelling

Through prayer, we begin to discern the heart and activity of Jesus "out there," and in a spirit of gratitude we are emboldened to reach outside the walls of our church and the cocoon of our home, to join Jesus in what he is doing in the lives of unchurched, non-believers. Prayer, of course, continues, for prayer opens "space" for true sharing--life-on-life. What we join Jesus in doing "out there" is sharing in the lives (the story) of other persons. To do that we go to them, not primarily to convey information but to listen to their stories. This leads to true place-sharing (as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it), which is to indwell the "story" of the other and thus to "feel" the other. And the essential skill for this feeling/indwelling is *empathy*, which is acquired through prayer and in time spent with other persons (ideally, in prayer with them).

Such encounters then give us opportunity to evangelize by "planting seeds" of the gospel, which involves sharing our

story as it relates to the story of Jesus.

## Evangelism as radical hospitality



"After calculating the per capita cost of winning new converts, the board recommends hiring temps."

At this point I want to offer a caution about what is reflected in the cartoon above—evangelism is not about mechanical, formulaic, high pressure sales techniques. True evangelism (what Root and Guthrie call *sacramental evangelism*) is the outflow of the Incarnation—the outflow of the reality that God has come among us as one of us in the person of Jesus who, creates the place and space in which believing is now possible as a gift of God through grace. Jesus, in his own person, is the space and place made visible and thus accessible by the Spirit. As evangelists, we help make that place and space visible and accessible through what we might refer to as "radical hospitality," which tells

nonbelievers (who I prefer to call "pre-believers") that, "we care about you," "you are welcome here," "you belong." Unfortunately many churches send the message to nonbelievers that they are nothing more than a project and, actually, are not welcome within the church until they first believe (and even behave!). Once they do, then (and only then), they can belong. Such churches see the gospel sequence as 1) believe, 2) behave, 3) belong. The actual gospel sequence is this: 1) you belong, 2) so believe this glorious truth, and 3) that will lead to the transformation of your life (including one's behavior).

Said more succinctly, the sequence is 1) belong, 2) believe, 3) become (for more about this sequence go to [resources.gci.org/](https://resources.gci.org/)) From the vantage point of this gospel-shaped perspective, evangelism involves showing radical "you belong" hospitality to nonbelievers. A powerful example of that is the way Jesus related to Zacchaeus (you'll remember him as the short Jewish tax collector who climbed the sycamore tree to see Jesus in Jericho).

### Know your audience

Extending radical hospitality to nonbelievers requires that we know our audience—that we gain an intimate knowledge of the people we are wanting to reach with the gospel. Getting to know people well has to do with the aforementioned idea of place-sharing. Sacramental evangelism is not about evangelistic "drive-by shootings"—it's about developing real relationship; it's about intimate, in-depth, personal, empathic knowing (and caring). As Root and Guthrie note,

*The greatest principle of Christian proclamation is: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The gospel hits the mark when it is couched in empathy for those who hear it. (Root and Guthrie, p. 50)*

In the book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, George Hunter illustrates this principle well in retelling of the story of St. Patrick's evangelizing of Ireland:

*Upon arrival at a tribal settlement, Patrick would engage the king and other opinion leaders, hoping for their conversion, or at least their clearance, to camp near the people and form into a community of faith adjacent to the tribal settlement. The "apostolic" (in the sense of the Greek word meaning "sent on mission") team would meet the people, engage them in conversation and ministry, and look for people who appeared to be receptive. They would pray for sick people, and for possessed people, and they would counsel people and mediate conflicts. On at least one occasion, Patrick blessed a river and prayed for the people to catch more fish. They would engage in some open-air speaking, probably employing parable, story, poetry, song, visual symbols, visual arts and, perhaps, drama to engage the Celtic people's remarkable imaginations. Often we think, Patrick would receive the people's questions and then speak to those questions collectively.... The mission team typically spent weeks, or even months, as a ministering community of faith within the tribe. (Hunter, pp. 21-22)*

Commenting on Patrick's strategy, Hunter notes that, "When people know that the Christians understand them, they infer that maybe the High God understands them too" (Ibid., p. 20). To be effective in this sort of relational, hands-on evangelistic ministry, a follower of Jesus' most important attribute is emotional intelligence (sometimes referred to as EQ)—being a person "in touch" with others—who cares deeply and knows how to effectively express that caring.

One of the ways we increase our EQ is by praying for those we are encountering to come to faith. As we do that, the Spirit will help us to be more sensitive to the clues that indicate their spiritual interest and thus emboldened us to enter into conversation with them, planting seeds of the gospel in their hearts and minds. For this to happen, of course, we must first be in relationship with them so we know what to pray about. As the opportunity presents itself to share our faith with a spiritually interested pre-believer, one of the things we can do is to ask if we might pray for them (another form of hospitality). Almost anyone (agnostics included) is open to being prayed for. And what they hear in that prayer can have a powerful impact, helping them understand the gospel more clearly in the context of their particular, stated need. This approach to sharing our faith is not "in your face" or otherwise pushy. It just means being present, learning about people and their needs and offering words of grace addressing their particular needs. This approach is not offensive, not pushy and not complicated, yet it is very powerful, and when God is directing it, it is highly transformative.

### **Just do it (and be creative!)**

There are all sorts of ways to show radical hospitality that will eventually lead to a conversation about the gospel with a person who shows spiritual interest. The important thing is that in having such a conversation, you use a method that works for you (an authentic expression of what God has placed in your heart), conveyed to the person you are speaking with in a way they can understand and so relate to.

Hunter notes how St. Patrick and his team were very creative and innovative in how they shared the gospel with the pre-Christian tribalistic Irish people. They basically shared the gospel in story form—ways that captured the imaginations (and hearts) of the Irish people. One wonders what methods will be best in our increasingly postmodern, post-Christian contexts in our world today.

**GCI principle** website and Moncton Websites—[www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org), [www.worshipim.ca](http://www.worshipim.ca), [www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton](https://www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton); For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website. *Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email—[evautour47@outlook.com](mailto:evautour47@outlook.com)*